



# United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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## Memorandum

To: Mexican Wolf Recovery Coordinator, Southwest Region

Through: Assistant Regional Director, Ecological Services, Southwest Region

From: Regional Director, Southwest Region

Subject: Management Decision; F1437 and Any Associated Uncollared Wolves

Under the Revision to the Regulations for the Nonessential Experimental Population of Mexican wolves (*Canis lupus baileyi*) (10(j) Rule), published on January 16, 2015, the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) or designated agency may carry out intentional harassment, non-lethal control measures, translocation, placement in captivity, or lethal control of problem wolves.

Mexican wolf F1437 has been involved in two confirmed depredations based on locations (2/9/16) and visual evidence (10/13/16 depredation: see chronology below). Visual evidence also indicates an uncollared wolf was involved in the 10/13/2016 depredation. Additionally, circumstantial evidence suggests that F1437 and an uncollared wolf were involved in up to seven additional depredations in the same area, though radio telemetry and visual evidence cannot directly corroborate this information due to the failure of F1437's radio-collar in March of this year. I direct the Interagency Field Team (IFT) to continue trapping efforts to remove F1437 or an associated uncollared adult wolf (whichever is captured first) and to place the wolf in captivity. In addition, if another depredation occurs, or if trapping is unsuccessful by November 12, 2016, which is 30 days from when I first directed that trapping be initiated for removal (October 12, 2016), I will determine if more aggressive measures are appropriate.

F1437 is thought to have produced pups in 2016 (based on a picture of F1437 consistent with a nursing animal in May 2016), but subsequent trail camera photos (8/22, 8/23, 8/24 (early morning hours), 8/26, 9/26, 10/2, and 10/4-10/7) and observations (10/15) have only documented two animals at one time. The IFT cannot conclusively determine whether the trail camera photos on 8/22 are only the adult pair, or possibly of F1437 with a pup. Potential pups have not been

observed after 8/22, and it is unlikely that pups remain with this pair. In addition, any potential pups can continue to be raised by the remaining adult or survive independently. The IFT will continue to implement proactive management efforts, including opportunistically hazing wolves away from cattle, managing diversionary food caches, working with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and permittee to evaluate and implement alternatives, and monitoring wolf and cattle interactions closely. Any non-target wolves (pups) captured will be processed, collared, and released on site.

### **Current Conditions**

F1437 is not considered genetically unique in the wild population. F1437 was caught as a yearling in 2015 as a member of the Diamond Pack, but genetic analyses indicated that her natal pack was Tsay-Oh-Ah. The Diamond Pack moved into the depredation area in December 2015. F1437 remained with the Diamond Pack at least until her collar failed in March 2016 and is thought to have bred with a member of the Diamond Pack in 2016, but she likely had moved away from the Diamond Pack to den in early May. F1437's collar malfunctioned on March 22, 2016, and has subsequently only been heard on a few occasions (6/22/16 and 10/4/16, and 10/17/16). F1437 has a history of assigned depredations both with (2/9/16) and independent from the Diamond Pack (10/13/16). Depredation data from 6/22 to 9/26 (see chronology below) suggest that many of the depredations in the area were also associated with F1437 and the uncollared wolf traveling with her. If true, F1437 has been involved in at least nine depredation incidents, and the uncollared wolf has been involved in at least eight depredation incidents.

### **Chronology of Recent Events Prompting this Management Decision**

- 2/7/16 – Cow killed by wolves, depredation assigned to uncollared wolves with no pack association or uncollared wolves associated with the Diamond Pack.
- 2/9/16 – Cow killed by wolves, depredation assigned to F1437, AM1249, M1454, and uncollared wolves of the Diamond Pack.
- 3/22/16 – F1437's collar quits working for GPS points, and VHF signal is rarely heard again, except as noted below.
- 5/1/16 – F1437 approximate den date based on pictures. Denning location thought to be south of highway 260.
- 5/10/16 – Calf killed by wolves, depredation assigned to M1454. (not associated with F1437 because the location of the depredation is ~ 24 miles north of the estimated den site and F1437 thought to be den bound at this time of year).
- 5/22/16 – Calf killed by wolves, depredation assigned to uncollared wolves (not associated with F1437 because the location of the depredation is ~ 24 miles north of the estimated den site and F1437 thought to be den bound at this time of year).
- 5/31/16 – Calf killed by wolves, depredation assigned to uncollared wolves (not associated with F1437 because the location of the depredation is ~ 24 miles north of the estimated den site and F1437 thought to be den bound at this time of year).
- 5/31/16 – Pictures taken by IFT of F1437 consistent with a nursing animal (sighting is ~24 miles south of depredations on 5/10, 5/22, 5/31, and 6/15).
- 6/15/16 – Calf killed by wolves, depredation assigned to uncollared wolves (not associated with F1437 because the location of the depredation is ~ 24 miles north of the estimated den

site and F1437 is thought to be near the den at the time, however, it is not possible to exclude F1437 based on the time of year).

- 6/22/16 – Calf killed by wolves, depredation assigned to one to two uncollared wolves (this was likely F1437 and an uncollared male based on the location being approximately four miles north of the estimated den site and 1437's location on 6/22).
- 6/22/16 – F1437 signal is heard in failing mode and is located approximately four miles south of depredation. First time signal is heard in approximately three months. Not heard again until 10/4/16.
- 7/4/16 – Calf killed by wolves, depredation assigned to one to two uncollared wolves (this was likely F1437 and an uncollared male based on the location being approximately 10 miles northwest of the estimated den site and 1437's location on 6/22 and 12 miles southeast of where the pair was documented with trail camera photos on 8/22, 8/23, 8/24 (early morning hours), and 8/26).
- 7/9/16 – Calf killed by wolves, depredation assigned to two uncollared wolves (this was likely F1437 and an uncollared male based on the location being approximately four miles north of the estimated den site and 1437's location on 6/22. In addition, this depredation was less than one mile away from the depredation on 6/22).
- 8/2/16 – Calf killed by wolves, depredation assigned to two or more uncollared wolves (this could be 1437 and an uncollared male based on the depredation being approximately seven miles northeast of the trail camera photos on 8/22, 8/23, 8/24, and 8/26. However, it is also seven miles southwest of where previous uncollared depredations occurred on 5/22, 5/31, and 6/15. Thus, it was not specifically attributed to the F1437 pair because there was not strong circumstantial evidence connecting the pair to the depredation).
- 8/12/16 – Calf killed by wolves, depredation assigned to two uncollared wolves (this was likely F1437 and an uncollared male based on the location being approximately 13 miles northwest of the estimated den site, 1437's location on 6/22, and the location being eight miles southeast of where the pair was documented with trail camera photos on 8/22, 8/23, 8/24 (early morning hours), and 8/26).
- 8/24/16 – Calf killed by wolves, depredation assigned to two uncollared wolves (this was likely F1437 and an uncollared male based on the location being approximately nine miles northwest of the estimated den site, 1437's location on 6/22, and the location being 12 miles southeast of where the pair was documented with trail camera photos on 8/22, 8/23, 8/24 (early morning hours), and 8/26).
- 9/4/16 – Calf killed by wolves, depredation assigned to one uncollared wolf (this was likely F1437 or the uncollared male based on the location being approximately eight miles northwest of den area and in the same locations as trail camera photos taken of the pair on 9/13/16).
- 9/13/16 – Trail camera photos of an uncollared wolf and a second wolf (presumed to be F1437) were taken near the depredation on 9/4/16. The IFT was unable to determine if the second wolf was collared due to photo quality.
- 9/26/16 – Calf killed by wolves, depredation assigned to two or more uncollared wolves (this was likely F1437 and an uncollared male based on the location being approximately eight miles north of den area, approximately three miles west of the trail camera photos taken of the pair on 9/13/16, and four and one half miles south of the location on 10/4 of 1437). In addition, F1437 and an uncollared animal were documented with trail camera photos on the carcass on 10/2 and 10/4 to 10/7.

- 10/4/16 – F1437 located via aerial telemetry five miles from the depredation on 9/26.
- 10/13/16 – Calf killed by wolves, depredation assigned to F1437 and an uncollared animal traveling with F1437.
- 10/15/16 – Two wolves (F1437 and an uncollared wolf) observed by an IFT member trapping in the area. The IFT member searched the area and discovered a dead calf that had been fed on and was located less than 0.25 mile from where F1437 and the uncollared wolf were observed. The calf was investigated on 10/15/16 and confirmed to have been killed by one or more wolves. The calf was estimated to have died on 10/13/16 (see above for assignment).
- 10/17/16 – F1437 located via aerial telemetry in the area of the 9/4 depredation and the 9/13 trail camera photos. This was the second flight from which the IFT was able to locate F1437 from the air. However, the IFT has been unable to get a signal on the ground despite observing F1437 on 10/15/16.

Throughout this time period, the IFT and the affected livestock producers have deployed a wide variety of aversive measures, including diversionary food caches and two range riders in the area. In addition, the livestock producers in the area have worked extensively with the IFT in previous years to prevent depredations. However, the lack of a functioning radio-collar in the pack has hindered the measures' effectiveness during 2016. Primarily, the IFT has focused on attempting to trap the uncollared wolves in the area based on fresh wolf sign associated with these depredations.

### **Decision**

I extend my sincere thanks to all those involved in analyzing implementing field efforts to protect livestock and conserve wolves. I make my decision fully considering the following:

1. I am concerned with the numerous depredations in this area. While the data are imperfect due to F1437's failed GPS collar and the rarely-working VHF collar component, the depredation pattern in the area is unacceptable.
2. F1437 was involved in at least one depredation with the Diamond Pack prior to forming a different pack with an uncollared wolf. Strong circumstantial evidence suggests that this pair has been involved in seven additional depredations, and a visual observation confirmed their presence at an eighth depredation.
3. I understand the IFT has attempted to trap on multiple occasions in this area and has been unsuccessful to date.
4. Finally, I am concerned that this pattern, left unmanaged, has the potential to continue on non-federal land in the future when cattle are removed from the forest allotment at the end of October.

Therefore, my decision is to remove either F1437 or the associated uncollared adult (whichever is captured first) from the wild by live trapping. While not expected to occur, any non-target wolves (pups) captured will be processed, collared, and released on site. I realize the toll that these successive depredations have caused this particular livestock producer. However, the decision to grant another 30 days for trapping stems from the decline in the number of Mexican wolves in the wild from the previous year and the belief that this female may have produced



pups. We will work diligently to prevent additional depredations. This removal order will be in effect for a 30-day period, beginning October 12, 2016. If any additional depredations should occur before the expiration of the 30-day trapping period, I want to be immediately consulted to determine if more aggressive measures, such as lethal control, should be initiated.

Removal activities may occur on Federal, tribal, state, and private lands within and adjacent to the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest, provided that permission is granted by the landowner or tribe. In the meantime, I direct the IFT to continue or increase their proactive management efforts to reduce conflict with livestock by: (1) Continuing to provide and maintain diversionary food cache(s), (2) continuing to conduct intensive monitoring and hazing of wolves in the area, as appropriate, (3) continuing to coordinate with livestock producers and the USFS in the depredation area, and (4) continuing efforts to radio-collar additional wolves within the depredation area. If F1437 or an uncollared wolf is removed and placed into captivity, the FWS will evaluate the potential for that wolf to contribute to recovery in the future.

The Mexican Wolf Recovery Coordinator permit (TE091551), issued May 6, 2015, under the provisions of 50 CFR 17.32, provides that Authorized Permittees may take any Mexican wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*) in the non-essential experimental population in a manner consistent with a FWS-approved management plan or species management measure adopted by the FWS pursuant to the provisions of 50 CFR 17.84, as well as to conduct activities related directly to the conservation, protection, and recovery of reintroduced non-essential experimental populations of Mexican gray wolves within Arizona and New Mexico. Provision S.I. of the permit provides that, "Specifically, authorization includes all actions related to: capture including, but not limited to, leg-hold traps, helicopter or ground darting and net-gunning, and captive capture methods: handling; possessing; administering health care; propagating; radio collaring, or other marking techniques; releasing, translocating, and cross-fostering; obtaining and preserving blood, tissue, fur, semen, ova, and other samples that are considered parts of Mexican wolves (scat is not considered a part of a Mexican wolf and can be collected without a permit); transporting between approved Mexican wolf captive management facilities in the United States and Mexico, to and from Veterinarian care facilities, and to approved release sites; purposeful lethal take (purposeful lethal take is limited to Mexican wolves within the MWEPA in Arizona and New Mexico); hazing via less-than-lethal projectiles; injurious harassment; research; and carrying out any other USFWS-approved husbandry practice, law enforcement, or management action for Mexican wolves."

The 2015 10j Rule states in section 17.84(7)(vii) that "The Service or a designated agency may take any Mexican wolf in the experimental population in a manner consistent with a Service-approved management plan, special management measure, biological opinion pursuant to section 7(a)(2) of the Act, section 6 of the Act as described in §17.31 for State game and fish agencies with authority to manage Mexican wolves, or a valid permit issued by the Service through §17.32." Thus, employees of the USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services are authorized to trap, or conduct lethal control, of Mexican wolves in accordance with this Decision Memorandum, and any incidental death or injury of wolves during this operation will be covered under the Mexican Wolf Recovery Coordinator permit (TE091551). The USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services employees working under this permit will not be considered negligent when exercising appropriate methodology. Appropriate methodology is defined as USDA-APHIS Wildlife

Services employees following all established policies and Standard Operating Procedures associated with Mexican wolf recovery.

I wish to thank the livestock producer in this incident for his efforts to reduce Mexican wolf-livestock conflicts, and the Mexican Wolf/Livestock Council and the Farm Services Administration for their financial compensation to the livestock producers for past, current, and any future depredation losses. I encourage the IFT to focus on field efforts and needs associated with the continued wolf monitoring in the area, with frequent reports conveyed to me through FWS contacts and normal agency channels.